

2015 Highway Construction Six-year Project Delivery Plan: Updated for New Revenue

WSDOT introduces its updated six-year highway construction project delivery plan

The Washington State Department of Transportation has moved to a long-range, six-year highway construction project delivery plan. This updated plan incorporates the legislature's new revenue funding and communicates WSDOT's intentions for specific investments in the transportation infrastructure beginning in fiscal year 2016.

We initially created the plan to comply with the Federal Highway Administration's requirement for the state to program four years of projects in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). We have updated the plan published in July 2015 to reflect the new law revenue, "Connecting Washington Account," projects coinciding with budget passage and to reflect changes directed in the enacted budget. The 2015 plan outlines planned project delivery through federal fiscal year 2021.

What are the benefits of a six-year plan?

By identifying six years of projects, we will improve communication and coordination between WSDOT and local governments. It will increase opportunities to strengthen partnerships and allows for improved planning and timing with regards to project delivery and mitigating traffic disruptions due to roadway construction.

An important concept built into the six-year plan is "over programming." This means the cost of the projects programmed exceeds federal revenue identified for the six-year timeframe. This approach allows us to have priority projects ready to utilize project savings or additional revenue that may become available, such as redistributed federal funding. This is important because we must obligate federal funds prior to September 30, or they will be taken back and redistributed to other states. Obligating all of the federal funding allocated to the state qualifies us to receive unobligated funds from other states.

What are the funding assumptions for the six-year plan?

- State funds from the motor vehicle account are set at the levels in the last enacted budget;
- State funds for TPA and Nickel are budgeted on the respective TPA and Nickel projects at levels associated with the last enacted budget. However, these amounts may change subject to updated delivery assumptions and within legislative flexibility allowed;
- State funds for Connecting Washington are budgeted on the respective projects and activities as directed by the legislature and listed in the LEAP Transportation Document 2015 NL-1 as developed June 28, 2015.
- Federal funds are assumed at MAP 21 levels, plus an amount for over programming. (The budget more closely aligns with the official revenue forecast and assumes an out-year reduction of 20 percent in federal funds.)

What are the programming assumptions?

We based target levels for sizing sub-programs and associated project-category investment levels on a combination of legislative expectations (expressed in the most recently passed budget) and direction from WSDOT executive management. Projects selected within the individual categories are based on priorities according to the Prioritization Manual. We then conducted tradeoff analysis to select projects that will achieve the greatest system performance.

Within the preservation and fish barrier programs, new revenue investments simply accelerated work that was previously planned for later dates. Project schedules generally follow the relative priority of the project in the priority array; higher priority projects are scheduled to proceed before lower priority projects.

How were projects prioritized?

We prioritized projects based on a high-benefit/low-cost philosophy aimed at improving the operating efficiency of the system. As a result, projects included in the plan reflect our incremental, tiered approach to ensure every improvement builds upon previous work so that no work is wasted. This approach separates strategies into three investment tiers to be implemented incrementally to maximize every dollar invested. The three tiers are:

1. Low-cost projects that deliver high return on capital investment and have short delivery schedules.
2. Moderate to higher-cost projects that provide additional benefits for both highways and local roads.
3. Highest-cost projects that deliver long-term solutions and corridor-wide benefits.

The tiered approach addresses the greatest number of needs with the least amount of capital investment. However, the level of available funding is not sufficient to address current needs and more projects are added to the growing backlog every biennium. This puts additional pressures on inadequate maintenance funding to keep the transportation system operational.

New project starts are focused in five areas:

1. Safety Improvements: Projects are focused on corridors or specific locations that have the most severe collisions.
2. Environmental Retrofits: Projects to fix fish passage barriers are the main priority. Other projects include correcting stormwater-runoff problem areas and correcting chronic environment deficiencies such as river bank erosion that can undermine the roadway.
3. Roadway Preservation: Projects that preserve the pavement allowing for vehicle travel.
4. Structures Preservation: Projects to repair structurally deficient facilities.
5. Other Highway Facility Preservation: Projects that enhance the safety of the traveling public by targeting investments in signals, culverts, unstable slopes, rest areas and weigh stations.

What will the Connecting Washington new revenue funding allow us to do?

1. Construct Mobility Improvements: Provides funding to move forward with some critical mobility projects throughout the state to improve congestion, enhance economic development and improve safety.
2. Eliminate Fish Passage Barriers: Provides funding to increase the number of fish barriers removed; allowing for greater access to fish habitat.
3. Address Preservation Needs: Invests in additional preservation projects to address pavement, bridge and other infrastructure deficiencies on the state system.

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